

## YEDONYA'S LETTER CONCERNING THE YAHU TEMPLE.<sup>1</sup>

[With regard to the discovery of this important document we refer our readers to the article by the Rev. A. Kampmeier in this number of *The Open Court*. This papyrus is a striking justification of the work of Old Testament higher critics, proving their conclusions to be correct with special reference to the reform of the priestly party. We learn from it that a temple of Yahu (also transcribed *Yahveh*, our "Jehovah") existed in the outskirts of Upper Egypt, that here sacrifices were offered which according to the Deuteronomic Law should be limited to the temple at Jerusalem, and that this temple was not built according to the rules laid down in the Levite Law ascribed to Moses. It further throws light on the habits and institutions of the Jews in the Dispersion and indicates that their mode of living was not as rigorous as after the priestly reform.

Strange to say that even at this time there existed an animosity among the Gentiles against the Jews, who were however protected by the central government of the Persian Empire. The hatred of the Egyptians was so intense that in the absence of the Persian governor they destroyed and plundered the Jewish temple. The malefactors were severely punished but the Jews had difficulty in procuring permission to rebuild the temple.

Yedonya's letter throws light on the Samaritan schism which was caused by the marriage of the son of the high priest of Jerusalem to the daughter of a Persian governor in Palestine. When forced to withdraw from Jerusalem he was powerful enough to establish an independent priesthood in the ancient sanctuary of Israel at Samaria, more ancient even than the temple at Jerusalem. Thus in one aspect the Samaritans represent a younger faction than the Jerusalemite Jews, but on the other hand they have utilized some older traditions and preserved the less nationalistic spirit of Israel's religion before the priestly reform.

Other documents found together with the present letter allow us an insight into the civilization and institutions of the age. They show that there were some wealthy men among the Jewish congregations, and it appears that the whole colony was prosperous. The temple utensils were of gold and bore the same names as those of Jerusalem. Jews intermarried with Gentiles, and

<sup>1</sup> The present English version has been made by Lydia G. Robinson after the German translation of Karl Eduard Sachau of Berlin with a consideration of Gunkel's article on the subject in the *Deutsche Rundschau* for Jan. 1908, and Dr. S. R. Driver's English version.

it appears that Gentiles who thus entered into the Jewish congregation adopted Jewish names.—ED.]

TO our Lord Bagôhi of Judah, [from] thy servant Yedonya together with his colleagues, the priests in the fortress of Yeb [Elephantine].

May our Lord, the God of Heaven, richly vouchsafe his blessing for all time! May he grant thee grace in the sight of King Darius and the princes of the royal house a thousandfold more plenteously than now, and give thee long life! Be blessed and in good health for ever more!

Now thus speak thy servants, Yedonya and his colleagues: In the month of Tammuz in the fourteenth year of King Darius when Arsham had departed and had journeyed to the King, the priests [*Pfaffen*] of the god Chnub [*Anubis*] in the fortress of Yeb formed a conspiracy with Waidrang who was in command here, that the temple of the god Yahu in the fortress of Yeb should be destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

Thereupon this Waidrang, a Lechite,<sup>3</sup> sent letters to his son Nephâyân who was in command of the fortress Syene<sup>4</sup> [saying], "The temple in the fortress of Yeb must be destroyed."

Thereupon Nephâyân brought in Egyptian and other troops; together with their. . . .<sup>5</sup> they came to the fortress Yeb, broke into this temple and razed it to the ground.

The stone columns that were there they shattered. It also befell that five stone gates built of hewn stone, which were in this temple, they destroyed. Only the swinging doors were left standing and the bronze hinges of these doors. The roof composed entirely of cedar beams, together with all the rest of the walls(?) and everything else that was there, they burned with fire. The bowls of gold and silver and the utensils that were in this temple,—everything they pillaged and appropriated to themselves.

But in the days of the kings of Egypt our fathers had already built this temple in the fortress of Yeb, but when Cambyses invaded Egypt he found this temple already erected; and though he tore down all the temples of the gods of Egypt, no one harmed anything in this temple.

<sup>2</sup> Here Dr. Driver's version reads "removed thence," but Sachau's rendering, *vernichtet*, seems to correspond better with the context.

<sup>3</sup> This word seems to have puzzled the translators. Sachau reads, *ein Lechiter*, Dr. Driver suggests "the accursed," and both query the word.

<sup>4</sup> Assuan.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Driver suggests "mattocks" here, as an afterthought, although he too left a blank in his version which appeared in *The Guardian*.

After they [Waidrang and the priests of Chnûb] had accomplished this, we clothed ourselves and our wives and children in sackcloth, and fasted and prayed to Yahu, the Lord of Heaven, who gave us an answer in this very Calibite<sup>6</sup> Waidrang: the buckles<sup>7</sup> have been taken from his feet; all the treasures which he acquired are lost; and all the men who have wished evil against this temple are slain. These things we have observed [with joy<sup>8</sup>].

Once before, when this misfortune came upon us, we sent a writing to our Lord and likewise to Jehochânân the High Priest and his colleagues, the priests of Jerusalem; and to his brother, Ostân (i. e., 'Anâni)<sup>9</sup> and to the elders of the Jews. But they have sent us back no letter.

And from the day of Tammuz in the fourteenth year of King Darius to this day we wear sackcloth and fast. Our wives are become like widows. We have not anointed ourselves with oil nor drunk wine. Nor from that time until the present day in the seventeenth year of King Darius have meal offerings, and frankincense or burnt-offerings been offered in this temple.

Therefore now thus speak thy servants, Yedonya and his colleagues, and all the Jews who are citizens of Yeb: If it seems good to our Lord, take heed for this temple to build it again, since it is not permitted to us to build it again. Think of those here in Egypt who have received thy benefits and mercies. Let a communication be sent by thee to them with reference to that temple of the god Yahu, to build it again in the fortress of Yeb just as it was before.

Then will meal offerings, frankincense and burnt-offerings be sacrificed upon the altar of the god Yahu in thy name. And we will pray for thee at all times, we and our women and children and all the Jews of this place, when this shall have been done, until this temple is built again.

And a share shall be given thee before Yahu the God of Heaven from every one who brings to Him a burnt-offering and sacrifices unto the value of one thousand talents (*Kukr*) of silver.

And as to the gold, we have sent a message and communication about it.

All these things we have communicated in writing in our own

<sup>6</sup> This may be another epithet applied to Waidrang. Sachau queries *Kalibbite* and Dr. Driver leaves a blank.

<sup>7</sup> Both translators query this word. Dr. Driver translates it by "chain" with "of office" added in parentheses, but "buckles" seems more reasonable.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Driver here uses the Biblical expression "and we have seen (our desire) upon them."

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Driver suggests that this may be "of Anani" instead of in apposition.

names to Delâyâ and Shelemya, the sons of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria. Arsham has known nothing of all this which has befallen us.

On the twentieth of Marcheshvân [November] in the seventeenth year of King Darius.

\* \* \*

Memorandum of what Bagôhî and Delâyâ, Sanballat's elder son, have told me. Memorandum as follows:

It rests with thee to give orders in Egypt before Arsham about the altar-house of the God of Heaven which had been built in the fortress of Yeb before our time, before Cambyses, which Waidrang, this Lechite (?) had destroyed in the fourteenth year of King Darius, that it should be built again in its place as it formerly stood. Meal-offerings and frankincense shall be offered upon this altar just as used to be done in days gone by.